
From: Scheer, David <dscheer@scheerandco.com>
Sent: Friday, February 15, 2013 2:11 PM
To: AppropriationTestimony
Subject: Appropriations for Mental Health Services in CT

Dear Members of the Health and Hospitals Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee, of the CT General Assembly.

I am responding to the proposed cuts in support of mental health services and research at the Connecticut Mental Health Center and at Yale's Department of Psychiatry. I am the President of Scheer & Company, Inc., a New Haven-based life science advisory firm. I also have been a serial entrepreneur in the life sciences during my 32 year career, having founded, launched and built 13 companies, including several in the CT area. I currently am Chairman of the Board of three publicly-held companies, Achillion Pharmaceuticals of New Haven, Aegerion Pharmaceuticals of Cambridge, Mass, and Tengion, Inc., of Winston Salem, NC. I have also been a founder and Chairman of a series of other companies, including some private companies -- two of which are located in CT - Axerion Therapeutics of Branford, CT, and Optherion, Inc. of New Haven. I am also on the Executive Committee of the Board of CURE. My comments reflected in this communication are not to be interpreted as representing those of any of my companies.

The thrust of my comments is focused on two topics -- the need for support of mental health services and research, and the importance of such efforts in promoting our life science innovation community.

If there is one analysis flowing from the recent tragedy in Newton at Sandy Hook Elementary School, it is that there is a crisis in mental health in our country. Those who commit these mass murders are by definition behaviorally challenged, and it is essential for us to identify such people well in advance of their plans to commit such horrendous crimes, such that steps can be taken to limit their ability to execute such plans. This analysis is actually shared by almost all segments of our otherwise divided society regarding issues of gun control. Although I am in favor of expanded controls regarding guns which are capable of mass murder, I also recognize that merely limiting the availability of assault weapons, high capacity magazines, etc., will likely not solely be effective in preventing these crimes. It is also unfortunately true that merely placing armed guards in schools will not eliminate the risk of having a school tragedy occur when a person hell-bent on committing such a crime focuses all of his or her energy on that goal. We need to take a multi-faceted approach, which should start on expanding behavioral health and research efforts in our state, and in our country.

I am very aware of the unique capabilities and record of excellence in behavioral health services and research based at the CHMC and at Yale. This is a precious asset of our state, and making dramatic cuts in these resources could have enormously negative consequences. What if these programs ceased to be doing the sort of research and/or treatment of children and adults with mental illness, and we MISS the chance of identifying the next psychopath who is focused on a mass murder?

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has said that "there is no health without mental health". This quote builds upon the multitude of adverse consequences of mental illness that are both direct and indirect. This year, the profound tragedy in Newtown struck a resonant chord, given the association of those with severe mental illness who can in some instances threaten the health, well being, and security of an otherwise civilized society. The consequences of poor mental health goes well beyond violence -- many public health challenges are linked to mental illness, the aggregate of which add dramatically to the disease and financial burden which our state, country, and society in general face.

The collaboration between CHMC and Yale has been an important force in drug development for neuropsychiatric disorders, such as those which can lead to the behaviors which promote violent tragedies. We have had a revolution in the treatment of the mentally ill, linked closely with successes decades ago in the development of anti-psychotic, antidepressant, and other classes of psychoactive drugs. This revolution has facilitated a shift away from merely institutionalizing millions of these people afflicted with mental illness, and towards these people becoming more productive (and less financially reliant) citizens. The pharmaceutical and biotechnology communities, being the organizations involved in developing innovative treatments, rely upon the fundamental knowledge generated by institutions like CHMC and Yale, but there is also a need for pursuing first rate clinical research to do the testing required for ultimate delivery of these drugs to patients. CHMC and Yale's Department of Psychiatry are two critical strategic assets in CT, but importantly, also for our society.

I hope that there is a reconsideration of these cuts in programs and grants, in light of Governor Malloy's stated interest in expanding our life science footprint in CT, as well as for the betterment of our behavioral health resources, which can be a front line weapon to protect us from the next mass murder or some other similar strategy, linked to an undetected or untreated individual with serious mental illness.